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Lithuania offended by Nazi hunters' reward

An offer by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to provide \$10,000 rewards for information about former Nazi collaborators in Lithuania has stirred strong passions in the Lithuanian press.

The centre has accused Lithuania more than once of an inability or unwillingness to try people suspected of collaboration with the Nazis.

The magazine Veidas takes offence, warning that the offer suggests Lithuanians are consciously hiding Nazi collaborators, and that only money would persuade them to reveal the names of persons who took part in the genocide.

"Obviously, this attitude hurts the pride of the Lithuanian people and it could start polluting the atmosphere in Lithuanian-Jewish relations and arousing mutual mistrust," the magazine warns.

"One must not forget that... the Nazis also used similar means to find Jews who were in hiding," Veidas concluded.

In countries as far afield as Britain and Australia, Lithuanians have found themselves on trial, accused of helping the Nazis round up and kill Jews during World War II.

There have only been two attempts to try war criminals in Lithuania, both of which were called off on the grounds that the defendants were too ill to stand trial.

The newspaper Kauno Diena warns that "any lawyer would agree that a great deal of information received in such cases is not only useless but also misleading".

"Will people's evidence be reliable? Is it possible to remember precisely enough things that happened 60 years ago? Moreover, as people are now ready to go to court over a small plot of land and families are torn apart by conflicts over property, only God knows what they might start saying about each other for \$10,000," the paper goes on.

It also notes that the head of the Jerusalem branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, Dr Efraim Zuroff, has admitted that the likelihood of victims recognising their oppressors is very remote.

"The most valuable information may only be given by accomplices of the criminals. These would then be the people to get the reward, although accomplices should be tried in the same manner as actual murderers," Kauno Diena concludes.